

Interview with Khadidja al-Saadi

Q: Leigh Day will be filing your case to the court in the next four weeks, how do you feel about that?

A: I am so happy about this. I see it as the first step to achieve the justice that we always wanted.

Q: Who do you blame for the rendition of yourself and your family?

A: I blame the British Government in general for being totally complicit in our rendition.

Q: Do you have any particular individuals on the British side who you think are the most responsible?

A: I don't know the names myself but the names are in the file on my case. All I care about is my rights from the British Government. I want to see who was involved in the rendition stand trial and get questioned for what they have done.

Q: What do you want to achieve from this court case?

A: Firstly, I want an apology from the British government for the breach and the calm caused by them. Secondly I want the truth to be revealed so that this doesn't happen again to someone else so that they are an example for other governments who would think about doing this to innocent people and thirdly I want justice to be achieved and nothing to be secret and everything to be known.

Q: When did you realise that things were going wrong and your trip to Hong Kong was becoming a nightmare?

A: I was 12 at the time. I think I was old enough to understand what was happening around me. Especially at the airport when I saw the treatment from the security personnel at the airport I realized that something was wrong and we were about to be detained. Nevertheless rendition never sprung to my mind until we were made to board the plane. This was when I realized and I had so much fear that we might be rendered to Libya.

Q: Can you describe the feeling that you had when you saw what was happening to your family when you got on to that flight?

A: It was a very difficult time. We went through many distressing incidents starting with our detention, our transfer from one place to another and then the terrorising atmosphere on the flight and the treatment by a number of ... officers ... Also being separated from my parents. The feeling was indescribable but I remember how terrified I was to the extent that I collapsed.

Q: What do you mean about the terrorizing time you had on the flight?

A: The flight was empty, no passengers, the separation from our parents, the many officers who were surrounding us — that on its own made us feel terrorised and fearful.

Q: What about when you collapsed, that was when you saw your father?

A: Yes. When I saw him handcuffed with plastic cuffs to the seat of the plane.

Q: Were you hurt or abused?

A: No

Q: When you arrived in Tripoli can you describe how you felt being separated as you were from your father?

A: At the beginning it was a shock and then gradually we thought that things might improve. Our idea of being rendered to Libya was torture, ill treatment and execution... The internal security would use different tactics with us. Sometimes they would give us the impression that everything was going to be fine, sometimes they would mention reconciliation with dissidents, that Libya is

entering a new phase, other times they would be threatening us – assuring and threatening and so on.

Q: Is it right that you were kept in a room with your family?

A: Yes it was on a farm

Q: Were you worried at that time for your father?

A: Yes I was. I was thinking that he might be executed or harmed in any way so no scenario was ruled out for me.

Q: After you released and lived with relatives before father released was that a nervous period? A happy period? Can you describe that?

A: After our release from the farm in Tajoura... until the start of the revolution on February 17, 2011, I felt that we were transferred from a small prison on the farm to a bigger prison called Libya. We felt constantly monitored and our phones and internet were intercepted. We were monitored at school as well

Q: Was this life in Libya worse than the life you had in Libya on the run?

A: The time in Libya was worse than the time when we were on the run. When we were moving from one country to another we felt that we were free to move despite the difficulties that we faced changing our identities, changing passports, but in Libya we didn't even have a passport we were not allowed to leave Libya. We felt that we were restricted and there was no where out of this.

Q: Do you feel that you changed as a person because of this experience?

A: Needless to say it impacted hugely on me. Sometimes it was a small impact sometimes a big impact. I think it was a very serious experience that affected my personality.

Q: Do you think you lost your childhood because you had to grow up fast?

A: This is something that I always thoughts about. I missed out on my childhood. I was different from other children. My rights as a child were breached. I had to live as an orphan when my father was still alive.

Q: Until now do you still have nightmares or any psychological effect because of this?

A: I don't suffer from nightmares but I have to say that it didn't negatively impact on me. It made me a stronger, more determined person. It didn't destroy me or break me at all. I think it made a poet out of me and encouraged me to excel and succeed in life and write articles. I think it was positive more than negative.

Q: When did you find out that the UK was involved in your rendition?

A: When the documents were released. Either found in Moussa Koussa's office or Abdulla Senoussi

Q: How did you feel when you discovered who had betrayed your family?

A: It made me feel that the UK and US Governments were hypocrites. They had double standards. On the one hand they would appear in the media as supporting the revolution and supporting the ousting of Gaddafi, while on the other hand we found out that there were deals under the table. I think it was disgusting and despicable.

Q: What does it tell you about the fact that they were willing to do this to children? What does it tell you about the sort of people who were involved?

A: It makes me believe more that all the principles and the values that both these governments, the US and the British, claim to stand for are just words with no meanings behind them. It wasn't new for me such a belief. I always new from other experiences throughout the world that the US and UK Governments had double standards. But what happened to me and our experience made me

believe strongly that it is all the way through, they will always prioritise interests over morals and values and I think that the equivalent of the world morals and values are their interests.

Q: What is your message to the British Government?

A: I as a child who suffered because of the betrayals. I became older and more mature and I have formed a picture about them and about their policies. This picture is difficult to change. It made me more determined to reveal the truth. As someone who wants to become a journalist I will keep attacking the double standards by any of these countries and all the powerful and dominating countries. A message from a child that these policies have to change and the reason for terrorism and the reason for hostilities in the Arab countries and the Muslim countries was because of their policies and because of their action that causes all of the terrorism.

Q: You are a student and you want to be a journalist?

A: Yes and I want to be a journalist, a poet and a novelist.

Q: Why do you want to have this future?

A: The experiences I have been through, the style of life that I have lived in made me be linked to politics and history. The background of my father who was a poet and used to write articles influenced my decision to become a journalist as well. It is something I enjoy.

Q: During the revolution were you quiet at home or were you active?

A: I used to write poems encouraging and enticing revolution. I wanted to take part in the protest but as someone who worried a lot about what could happen to me and how the previous Libyan government could cause harm to me I was unable to take part in it.

Q: Can you describe how you felt when the revolution won?

A: I was confident from day 1 that this revolution would succeed despite the pressure, the stress and the oppression and the war launched in the media by the previous regime. I was confident that god's hand would be superior over this oppressive regime and the truth would come out and God will help all the Libyans and help them in taking revenge against the previous regime.

Q: Now what are your hopes for the future of your country?

A: After the revolution started I organised a movement called Ambition and the aim of the movement is to build Libya culturally and assist the development of Libya. This movement is supported by the Tripoli local council and I feel so happy and excited that we as youth have been given the chance to freely participate in building Libya.

Q: What about your thoughts towards Britain given that it helped the revolution. Is Britain a friend or will you always be suspicious of Britain because of your experiences?

A: When I talk about the British government I don't mean the British people. I have many British friends and I have no problem with them. I am talking about the British Government. I formed a bad image about the British government even after their support for the revolution this didn't improve the image because I see this as them pursuing their interests. I am hoping that they can change this image and this picture and this would be by showing really that they protect the human rights to start with by changing the negative picture and the first step would be to give up the two people responsible in our rendition. They have to achieve justice, they have to give an apology. I am sure that this apology would be recognized and respected by history because they are trying to amend the mistakes they have done and this is very important to help me to turn the page and forget about what they have done to me. I think that Libya will have a good future and will be looking forward to deal honourably with other countries including Britain and I am sure that there will be mutual interests and a relationship between them.

Q: When you say two people do you mean Jack Straw and Mark Allen?

A: These are two names amongst other people. I am sure there will be more.

Q: Such as Tony Blair?

A: Even if the court cleared him or he wasn't found liable for our rendition I think he was directly responsible for our rendition because this happened in the time when he was a Prime Minister so I think he is responsible.

Q: Would you like to see other members of MI6 standing trial?

A: I believe that everyone who knew about the rendition and was in office at the time of the rendition is fully responsible for our rendition and what happened.

Q: Do you think it is unfair that Britain will face a court case whereas no one is targeting America or trying to find justice there?

A: I don't agree that there is any unfairness in bringing a claim against the British government. If we were able to bring a claim against the US then we would do the same. You are aware that the breaches of the US are continuous and widely known and happens everywhere, Iraq and Afghanistan. But we believe that the British Government can be better at dealing with the case than the US because in the US talking about breaches is not acceptable so they would not accept a case in court against them but we are hoping that one day we might be able to bring a case against the US.

Q: What are your brothers and sister up to?

A: They are living a normal life after the success of the revolution. Mustapha is at university studying medicine. Anes is at university studying engineering, and my sister is at school

Q: What is your mother doing?

A: She is a housewife. She spends most of the time at the house.

Q: Do you think your brothers and sister have been permanently affected by the rendition and what happened?

A: The permanent effect was on all of us. We tried to forget and move on. If we think about the negative aspects of the experience we won't be able to survive. I believe that we succeeded in lessening the impact of the experience on us.

Q: Was the rendition the most frightening thing that has happened to you?

A: Yes I would say it was a difficult experience but the war in Afghanistan was I think worse than the rendition experience. We witnessed civilians being killed and their houses being bombed and there was no media coverage to show the breaches by the US army. We were very close to death when we were there and it was a very bad experience but it does not mean that it was the only bad experience. We had a bad experience trying to flee from Afghanistan to Pakistan and from Pakistan to Iran and all the other incidents.

Q: How long were you in Afghanistan?

A: Maybe a year in Kabul, we arrived in 2000 and left after the September 11 attacks.

Q: Is that one of the reasons why your father was linked with terrorism suspicion?

A: Anyone who read the history of my father would know that he had nothing to do with terrorism. Even when Osama Bin Laden offered him to join al-Qaeda he refused, saying that he thinks differently and does not think in the same way as al-Qaeda. The US and the British Governments know this. We lived in Britain for a number of years. The British Government must have a file on my father, the way he was thinking, his political views and that he was not linked with any terrorism. I know that they know that.

Ends

Interview with Sami al Saadi

Q: Lawyers plan to file litigation in the next few weeks, how do you feel about that?

A: I feel relief and excited that after the oppression and grievance I faced I will be able to get back my rights. It will make a lot of difference to many people to see how this goes.

Q: What do you think the UK did wrong against you?

A: Unfortunately I was shocked when I found out that the UK breached what she always stood for when she claimed about protecting human rights. The British embassy at the time looked as though they wanted to help me and give me the indefinite leave (to remain in the UK) but after the documents were revealed after the revolution we found out that they were involved in my rendition.

Q: What will it mean to you to have members of the British Government standing in court and facing charges for what happened to you?

A: Achieving justice is one of the aims of many cultures and religions so it is very important. Forgiveness as well against people who participated in causing any grievance or torture to other people is a very important aspect of Islam. Yet we need to see justice on earth. We need to see punishment for perpetrators because this will put off others who would think about doing the same to other innocent people like myself. Protecting other innocent people from receiving the same treatment is higher than forgiveness.

Q: Can you describe how you felt the moment you realized what was going on when you moved to Hong Kong, hoping to get asylum in the UK but instead getting rendered?

A: It was a big shock when I realized that I was about to be rendered with my family and my children. There were signs and some events that happened which made me realize that the CIA might be involved. For example, I saw the officers whispering the words CIA so I suspected I might be rendered... When I saw the Libyan security officers on the plane I realised that I had fallen into a trap and I was deceived by those who claimed to be human rights preservers. How can someone who claims to protect human rights subject a wife and children as young as six, how can they do this to an innocent family, how can they make them subject to torture, how can they be involved in my rendition, how can they be partners in my rendition and detention in Libya and possibly my execution?

Q: Did you believe that the time that Britain was your friend?

A: It is not a matter of friendship. I sought asylum before in the UK, I was a refugee. I had to leave the UK for a while and I asked them if I can come back and resume living here in the UK. They gave me the impression that they would protect me and my family against any danger I could face. They claimed that they are implementing the international conventions and laws of protecting refugees or protecting anyone who might be subject to torture in his country but unfortunately that wasn't true.

Q: When did you first realise that Britain was involved in your rendition?

A: There were strong evidence and signs that something was wrong. I was made to disembark the plane, the fact I heard officers whispering CIA and the fact that my wife and I were handcuffed. The CIA appeared to be the ones on the scene and I had doubts where the British were. They should have been in the picture as I sought asylum in the UK and I was given the impression that it was ok for me to return to the UK so it was suspicious that they did not appear in the picture. Then after the documents were found in the archive of the external security building after the revolution it became definite and beyond doubt that there was correspondence between the CIA and the

external security people and some of the documents referred to the involvement of the British. At first it was just suspicions and then it became definite that they were involved.

Q: When you saw these papers how did it make you feel – that someone you thought was your ally had betrayed you?

A: The atmosphere at the time that the documents were found was so overwhelming with victory of the revolution so maybe I was not as depressed as I would have been. I felt very excited and happy that I was able to get my rights from those who were involved in my rendition and even question them and bring them to accountability so it is a sort of victorious feeling for me that now I can pursue these people and bring them to accountability.

Q: While in detention where you ever visited by British agents?

A: Yes. Once when I was held at the external security building a British man and woman introduced themselves as coming from Britain. They sat with me in the presence of one of the external security officers they started questioning me and interrogating me. They said they would come back but I never saw them again.

Q: What were they asking you?

A: They asked me many questions relating to terrorism and banned organizations that were involved in activities.

Q: Were they concerned about your well being and treatment?

A: It is difficult to confirm or deny whether they were concerned with that. I tried to gesture to them that I was being subjected to ill treatment. I tried – using my hands and my eyes – but I couldn't because of the presence of the internal security officer who was staring at me the whole time. They asked general questions about my family and other questions about those who were accused of being terrorists.

Q: What was your darkest moment during your long years in detention?

A: It was very tough the first few months of my detention but these tough moments would come and go. The feeling that I fell into the hands of my worst enemy who tried for years to capture me with no success, it was really awful when I saw the excitement in the eyes of my capturers. In 2004 Libya claimed it had resolved all the problems with the Gaddafi dissidents. They appeared forming a coalition with Western countries against all dissidents and opponents. Sometimes I described myself as feeling desperate and disappointed but it did not last for long but I never lost hope that this would be over some day.

A: Can you describe the sort of torture you suffered?

Q: There were different types of torture — the emotional, the physical, the electrocution, the insults, the humiliation, the threats. The worst moment for me was to feel that the criminals who were running the Libyan government . . . were accusing an innocent person like me of being involved in terrorism when they were the ones doing the terrorism. I was innocent and I felt that I was oppressed and aggrieved by my country and by those who were involved with my country... I felt I was lonely and had no one to complain to but God. I was not allowed any legal representation no court, no trial, nothing. I was held by an oppressive regime and I felt helpless, unable to defend myself. His regime has committed lots of crimes. We discovered mass graves from those who were control of our lives at the time. They made you feel that we were on the wrong side and they were on the right side. My biggest fear was that I might say something by a slip of the tongue that might harm any innocent Libyan citizen and he could face the same treatment that I was facing. This fear lasted for the first month. All the above was torture not to

mention the deterioration of my health, which I felt was deliberate and was a kind of torture to me as well.

Q: In terms of long term effect, do you still suffer from nightmares now?

A: Not as it was when I was first detained. It gradually lessened as the time went

Q: Has this experience changed you as a person?

A: We have a saying that the test that doesn't break your back makes you stronger. I think I came out of this experience with a strong belief in religion, faith and justice - the fact that I was saved and other Libyans were saved from such a regime. I was considered to be one of the most wanted dissidents but God rescued me from the hands of this regime. I also learnt that many countries would lie about their protection of human rights and how they preserve humanity and yet they contradict themselves when they have benefit or interest to pursue through our torture. I would say that every stage I faced in my life taught me something.

Q: Do you believe that if the UK had not intervened you would not have been rendered?

A: Possibly yes. I believed that they played a vital role in my rendition.

Q: In terms of that you mean MI6 are the people who hold the most blame?

A: I mean all those who were involved in my rendition, all the ministers but specifically MI6 who liaised directly with the Libyan external security for my rendition.

Q: Had you ever spoken to Mark Allen or heard of him until the papers were released?

A: No. I never met him or spoke to him or heard of him before the release of the documents.

Q: What would you say to him if you could speak to him?

A: If I met Mark Allen I would tell him that nothing lasts forever. Things always change. Sometimes someone would think that he can bury all the dirt, that he is powerful and everything would go smoothly as he wanted but things will turn and those who claim they are protectors of human rights and against torture would appear as being involved in torture.

Q: We know of Belhaj and his wife but do you believe that the British were involved in the rendition of other Libyans?

A: Not to my knowledge but possibly it might be the case.

Q: When did you speak to the British man and woman?

A: No later than 2005, perhaps 2004 or 2005.

Q: British security services would argue that they were acting in the best interests of Britain's national security. Are you worried that your legal action will impact on the ability of Britain's security services in the future to be able to fight against terrorism and people they perceive to be a threat to Britain's national security?

A: It is a very important issue. I agree with you, how a security service can strike a balance between security and protecting human rights. Only a skilled security service in any country would be able to achieve that balance. We were very sarcastic about the Libyan security service because they used torture and killing and detention and execution and all sorts of things under the name of protecting security in Libya. We understand that they do have a duty to protect security but not be jeopardising human rights and at the expense of innocent people.

Q: Is it important that ministers should bear the responsibility even though they were just acting in the best interests of the country? Do you think that Tony Blair, Jack Straw should bear responsibility as well as whoever was in charge of the different security services?

A: It is the duty of all government services to protect security and observe human right principles and make sure that they are not breaching these principles. In Islam we have a principle that says everyone in charge should bear the responsibility and not wash his hands of the action of those

who he rules or those who he supervises and he needs to make sure that they are not crossing the red line. His omission to their acts or his silence makes him responsible makes him as responsible and liable as they are.

Q: Jack Straw and Mark Allen have been issued with papers. Would you like for Tony Blair to be issued with papers so he too may have to face charges for what happened?

A: I would defer this to my legal team. They have got the file and can study it. If they find that there is evidence or any circumstances that leads to the belief that Tony Blair was involved so I would say yes, if they think it is fit then yes to bring Tony Blair as well.

Q: Now you are looking to the future and to become an MP, is that right?

A: Yes I am standing for election as an MP representing the National Party and it is up to voters to vote for me or not.

Q: Why did you want to run as an MP?

A: I didn't want to run at first but many people prompted me to be involved. I was away from politics and my role was just to provide guidance and the right values but I was urged by people surrounding me to be more involved in politics.

Q: Do you think Britain's cozy relationship with the previous regime will affect the way the new Libya treats Britain?

A: It is important to talk about this issue. We think that any wrong that has been done by important services in the UK or any wrong done by some members of the Government of the UK should not impact negatively on any future relationship between the new Libya and the British Government but that is on the condition that we get our rights and everyone who was complicit in our treatment would be accountable for their actions. We hope and look forward for the cooperation between the new Libya and the UK and other western countries as well. We look for economic and political cooperation and I am sure that any old problems would be resolved.

Our case would not stop any political relationship with any country, but someone would understand that the more positive a country was to the Libyan revolution to overthrow the previous regime the more priority they would have with the economic relationship with Libya. Those who backed the revolution would have a priority in our economic relationship as opposed to those who stood against the revolution. They might be down the list in economical relations.

Q: Where did you live in the UK?

A: I lived in different areas in London

Q: Do you have any happy memories of your time in Britain?

A: There was a positive point in our presence in the UK. I sought asylum in the UK. I was living there as a dissident as one of the most wanted people on Gaddafi's list but myself and my family felt safe in the UK we felt more settled after moving in different countries and being monitored in those countries we felt it was safe and more settling for us despite the breach of human rights that Britain took part in later. I was able to write articles and reflect and think about the future of Libya and how to save the Libyan people from the oppression of the previous regime. I was an activist in the UK in the media in Libya I was able to write articles from the UK.

Q: Is it correct that when the revolution happened you were in Abu Salim and it was the worst time that you suffered?

A: At the beginning of the revolution I was in Tripoli. I was approached by Saif, Sannousi and Saadi and internal security to appear in the media and denounce the revolution. I rejected that and our area started to participate in the revolution. They were not armed and did not have any weapons. That started on February 23, where the brigade of the previous regime raided the area and started

to shoot everywhere. I decided to disappear for a month. April 2011 I was captured with my son. He was detained for 20 days and I was detained for four months until the revolutionaries raided Abu Salim prison to liberate us. They broke the locks of the prison to liberate us. When I was arrested in April 2011 I was kept in Zaraydi prison and after 20 days I was transferred to Abu Salim on that day I was given an execution jump suit which I wore until my liberation.

Q: Were those days the worst in terms of torture?

A: It wasn't the worst period. There were periods of torture when I was held in Abu Salim in 2007 and also in Tajoura, especially the first month and a half that I was held there. In Abu Salim the last month was really bad to the extent that when I was released from the prison I needed assistance to walk. I was forced to walk bare foot on broken glass. I was denied medical treatment.

Q: Can you remember the emotion you felt at the moment that you realized you were free?

A: It was unforgettable moment. Despite being held in solitary confinement, despite the pain and the illness I was suffering from me and other detainees would try to follow what was happening in the media. We felt in the last few days that the regime was suffocating and about to end. The release moment was amazing not just because I was released but I was happy for the whole country. I was happy for Libya to liberate and get rid of this oppressive regime. After my liberation I would walk and drive with my friends in the streets of Tripoli for two months. It was life living a dream.

Q: What about now, how do you feel about your future?

A: I feel relief and optimistic about the future. I feel that I am a free man. I can take part in politics without any fear or restraints.

Notes:

Mr Straw refused to comment on the case, but has previously denied participating in or knowledge of unlawful rendition.

Statement from a Foreign and Commonwealth Office spokesperson:

“Civil litigation proceedings are underway, so we are unable to comment on the details of this case;

“HMG will co-operate fully with the police investigations into allegations made by former Libyan detainees about UK involvement in their mistreatment by the Qadhafi regime.

“Because of these investigations, there is no prospect of the Gibson Inquiry being able to start in the foreseeable future. So following consultation with Sir Peter Gibson we have decided to bring the work of his Inquiry to a conclusion. We have agreed with Sir Peter that the Inquiry should provide the Government with a report on its preparatory work to date, highlighting particular themes or issues which might be the subject of further examination. The Government is clear that as much of this report as possible will be made public.

“We still fully intend to hold an independent, judge-led inquiry once all of the related police investigations have concluded.”